



STRESS MANAGEMENT AND GENERATION Y

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Abstract

Workplace stress is recognized as one of the most critical psychosocial risks in today's work environment, with profound implications for employee well-being and organizational performance. This paper provides a comprehensive examination of the concept of stress, drawing on historical and contemporary scientific perspectives, emphasizing physiological, psychological, and organizational dimensions. Theoretical foundations are analyzed through the work of Selye, Lazarus, Shapiro, Slavich, and others, alongside an exploration of predominant sources of occupational stress, including organizational, psychosocial, individual, and digital stressors. The article focuses on high-risk professions such as healthcare, education, information technology, and service sectors. Furthermore, the study investigates stress coping strategies, including professional training, teamwork, employee assistance programs (EAPs), flexible work arrangements, positive organizational culture, and supportive leadership. An original empirical study involving over 50 respondents examines generational, gender-based, and professional differences in stress perception and response and the influence of managerial support. The findings highlight the necessity for a systemic and integrated approach to stress management that transcends individual responsibility and promotes organizational and cultural transformation. The paper concludes with practical recommendations tailored to the Macedonian context to enhance psychological well-being and workplace effectiveness.

Keywords: Occupational stress, organizational stressors, coping mechanisms, psychological health, human resource management

1 DEFINITION OF STRESS

Work-related stress is a widespread phenomenon that can develop quickly into a chronic condition, given the vital role of work in modern life (Slater, 2004). Occupational stress is associated with

reduced productivity, sleep disturbances, an increased risk of workplace accidents, and the development of both physical and mental health disorders.

The term *stress* was first introduced in the 1930s by Canadian endocrinologist Hans Selye, who used it in a medical context to describe the body's response to prolonged exposure to external stimuli. Selye (1956) defined stress as the general,

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nonspecific response of the organism to any demand for adaptation. Rather than responding with a targeted physiological mechanism, the organism activates a broader set of biological reactions to cope with the stressor.

Richard Lazarus expanded the understanding of stress by shifting the focus toward psychological processes. According to his transactional model, stress is not solely a product of external stimuli or physiological reactions, but rather the result of an individual's cognitive appraisal of environmental demands (Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Stress arises when an individual perceives that the needs of a situation exceed their available coping resources. The importance of this subjective interpretation in understanding workplace stress cannot be overstated, as individuals may perceive similar situations in vastly different ways.

Shapiro (2009) emphasized the psychological effects of stress and the role of emotional regulation and mindfulness as effective coping strategies. The modern work environment often imposes continuous cognitive and emotional demands, particularly in occupations requiring high levels of empathy and interpersonal engagement, such as healthcare or social work. These pressures frequently lead to emotional exhaustion and professional fatigue.

Slavich (2016) defines stress as a psychological state that arises when an individual perceives that environmental demands exceed their coping abilities, emphasizing the personal and dynamic nature of the perception of stress. Stress is understood as a psychophysiological reaction triggered by personal, professional, or social challenges that exceed one's coping resources.

Contemporary research further emphasizes the dynamic interplay between the individual and the environment, framing stress as an ongoing, interactive process (Cohen, Gianaros, & Manuck, 2016). This perspective highlights the necessity of continuing research and proactive stress management practices. It allows organizational leaders to treat stress not merely as an individual issue but as a systemic risk factor that can hinder productivity, employee satisfaction, and organizational resilience. Effective interventions can prevent the escalation of stress into burnout, absenteeism, or turnover, while fostering a

healthier and more sustainable workplace environment.

2 ANALYSIS OF STRESS FACTORS

Employees' perceptions of stressful situations depend on their resources and social support network. Stress factors can be categorized into the following groups:

- Organizational factors
- Psychosocial factors
- Individual factors, and
- Digital (technological) sources of stress.

2.1 Organizational Stressors

According to Brough et al. (2017), organizational stressors include excessive workload, lack of autonomy, role ambiguity, and limited development opportunities. Empirical evidence suggests that a fast-paced work environment and unrealistic expectations contribute to chronic stress and reduced employee engagement. Additionally, organizational changes introduced without proper communication intensify employee pressure (Hakanen et al., 2022). Excessive workload increases the risk of emotional exhaustion and diminishes performance (Schaufeli, 2017).

A toxic organizational culture and poor leadership practices—especially authoritarian leadership—are associated with heightened stress and anxiety. Conversely, transformational leadership reduces stress levels and fosters organizational commitment. Uncertainty during periods of change or restructuring significantly elevates workplace stress (Wang et al., 2021).

2.2 Psychosocial Stress Factors

Psychosocial stressors include workplace conflicts, lack of social support, and disrupted work-life balance. The absence of social support from colleagues or supervisors fosters feelings of isolation and vulnerability (Giorgi et al., 2021). Interpersonal conflicts, particularly with supervisors, may lead to long-term psychological consequences such as anxiety and depression.

Perceived injustice, discrimination, and ineffective communication are strong occupational stress predictors. Modern work models—such as hybrid or remote work—while offering flexibility, may also increase stress due to blurred work-life

boundaries and lack of personal recovery time (Wang et al., 2021). Work-related stress and emotional exhaustion are particularly pronounced in highly competitive and profit-driven work cultures (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

2.3 Individual Stress Factors

Individual stress factors relate to personal characteristics, cognitive appraisal, and coping abilities. Individuals high in neuroticism, with low self-esteem, or perfectionist tendencies are more susceptible to stress. According to Schaufeli (2021), self-critical individuals are at greater risk of experiencing strain.

Moreover, the perception of a stressor and the individual's coping capacity are crucial in determining stress intensity. Active coping strategies, such as planning and problem-solving, are associated with better psychological outcomes (Giorgi et al., 2021). Personal values, expectations, and one's physical and mental health status also modulate stress perception.

2.4 Digital Stressors (Technostress)

The rise of digitalization—accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic—has introduced new sources of stress, commonly referred to as technostress. While digital tools enhance flexibility and productivity, they also contribute to psychological strain. Tarafdar et al. (2015) and Molino et al. (2021) identify several categories of digital stressors:

- Technological overload – constant notifications and multitasking lead to cognitive fatigue.
- Technological invasion – the boundary between work and private life becomes increasingly unclear (Wang et al., 2021).
- Technological complexity – digital tools can create frustration, particularly for those with limited IT skills.
- Technological insecurity – rapid technological changes may lead to fear of skill obsolescence.
- Technological surveillance – continuous monitoring affects employees' sense of autonomy and privacy (D'Arcy & Lowry, 2017).

3 PROFESSIONS PRONE TO STRESS

In recent years, rapid technological change, evolving job demands, and the emergence of new work models have significantly increased exposure to occupational stress. While stress was once associated with specific high-risk professions, it is now prevalent across various industries, including healthcare, education, technology, and services. Research since 2010 has demonstrated a direct link between occupational stress and mental health, as well as its impact on individual well-being and organizational performance (Eurofound & EU-OSHA, 2014; WHO, 2019).

The following sections outline professions most vulnerable to chronic work-related stress:

- **Healthcare Professions: Chronic Pressure and Emotional Burden**

Healthcare workers, particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, face persistent stress due to shift work, long hours, and emotional strain in patient care. Zhang et al. (2020) reported high stress levels among medical personnel in China, while Prasad et al. (2021) emphasized the heightened emotional stress experienced by women in healthcare. Prolonged exposure to such conditions often leads to professional overexertion, reduced work capacity, and mental disorders.

- **Education Sector: Digital Transformation and Professional Overload**

In the education sector, the integration of digital technologies and increased administrative burdens contribute to cognitive and emotional overload. Day and Qing (2009) emphasized that teachers continuously engage in emotional labor, leading to decreased motivation and professional satisfaction. Pressley (2021) identified lack of resources, conflicts with parents and administrators, and technological overload as primary stressors. These factors severely affect teachers' mental health and job retention.

- **IT and Technology Professions: Cognitive Demands and Permanent Availability**

Professionals in the IT and technology sectors are exposed to high cognitive demands and a culture of continuous availability. Tarafdar et al. (2015) observed that startup employees frequently experience intense pressure, which manifests as chronic stress and physical symptoms (e.g., headaches, muscle tension). Additionally, fear of missing out (FOMO) and rapid technological changes fuel anxiety and professional instability.

- **Service Sector: Emotional Labor and Customer Exposure**

Workers in the service sector, including hospitality, finance, and customer service, are regularly exposed to stress due to frequent interpersonal interactions and emotional regulation demands. Grandey (2000) introduced the concept of emotional dissonance, where employees must display positive emotions despite internal fatigue, leading to psychological exhaustion. Low wages, insecure contracts, and customer aggression exacerbate these stressors. According to Zapf et al. (2001) and Hülshager & Schewe (2011), such working conditions result in increased irritability, sleep problems, and high turnover.

- **Social and Helping Professions: Borderline Conditions and Burnout Risk**

Professionals in social work, mental health, and counseling frequently engage with clients in crisis, exposing them to secondary trauma and empathic strain. Bride (2007) identified a high prevalence of vicarious trauma in these professions. The emotional demands and ethical challenges can lead to severe burnout and mental health deterioration. Continuous supervision, team-based support, and psychological resilience training are essential preventive measures.

interventions were predominantly individual-oriented and reactive, focusing on mitigating the consequences of stress after it had already manifested. Common methods included relaxation techniques, cognitive restructuring, and social support mechanisms.

After 2005, however, the focus shifted toward systemic and organizational approaches. These modern strategies take into account the broader context of organizational culture, leadership styles, and employee mental health, emphasizing prevention rather than reaction. They include practices such as flexible work arrangements, comprehensive well-being programs, and the use of digital tools to monitor employees' physical and psychological states (Khoury et al., 2015).

Among the most prominent contemporary strategies are mindfulness-based interventions, particularly Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programs, which have shown significant effectiveness in reducing stress and anxiety (Khoury et al., 2015). Similarly, Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) has gained popularity in workplaces that implement structured mental health initiatives.

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) have evolved from offering fundamental counseling services. They are integrated platforms that include psychological support, coaching, and digital resources (Attridge, 2019). In parallel, flexible work models—such as remote work, reduced hours, and increased autonomy—have proven to improve work-life balance and decrease chronic stress.

The field of positive organizational psychology (Sullivan-Singh et al., 2015) has introduced new concepts, including organizational well-being, psychological capital, and a culture of recognition, all of which foster stronger individual and team capacities to cope with stress.

Emphatic leaders, who exhibit emotional intelligence and open communication, contribute significantly to psychological safety and reduce organizational tensions, play a critical role.

4 SYNTHETIC AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF STRESS COPING STRATEGIES

Research conducted over the past three decades demonstrates a notable evolution in strategies for managing workplace stress. During the 1990s,

Contemporary models, unlike classical theories such as those by Selye or Lazarus, perceive stress as a systemic, dynamic phenomenon. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) emphasizes the equilibrium between job demands and available resources as essential for stress management. Although Lazarus's cognitive appraisal theory remains influential, modern approaches have expanded to incorporate biopsychosocial and organizational dimensions.

In conclusion, stress coping strategies have evolved from individual and reactive responses to systemic, proactive, and integrated approaches. A sustainable strategy for managing occupational stress now requires a foundation built on mental health culture, empathetic leadership, organizational flexibility, and psychological support systems.

5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The majority of the surveys were conducted online, enabling efficient distribution and access to a broader respondent base. This approach allowed the researchers to reach a larger sample within a shorter timeframe and at a lower cost. Moreover, online participation preserved respondent anonymity, which is known to enhance the likelihood of obtaining honest and accurate answers. To complement this, a portion of the questionnaires was distributed in person, ensuring greater diversity in responses.

Participant selection was based on the following criteria:

- Individuals born between 1981 and 1996 (Generation Y).
- Participants with academic-level education.
- This sample size ensures that the requirements for reliability, representativeness, and statistical relevance are met. It also provides a balanced approach between data accuracy and participant availability. Finally, the sample is also limited by time and financial constraints.
- The questionnaire consisted of two parts, with a total of 14 questions:

- Part 1 included four demographic questions regarding gender, education level, age group, and work experience.
- Part 2 explored participants' attitudes toward effective stress management. This section utilized a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) to assess opinions on various workplace stress coping mechanisms.

The first table presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents, including gender, education level, age group, and work experience, and is displayed as Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Category	Subcategory	Frequency (N)
Gender	Male	29
	Female	25
Education Level	Bachelor's Degree	45
	Master's Degree	7
	Doctorate (PhD)	2
Age	Under 25	25
	26–31	14
	32–37	4
	38–43	9
	Over 43	2
Work Experience	Up to 5 years	19
	6–10 years	28
	11–15 years	5
	Over 15 years	2

Source: Own research of the authors

The data from these demographic categories were used to gain a better understanding of the respondents' background and their potential influence on the perceptions of stress management within this generation.

Subsequently, we constructed Table 2 based on the collected responses and calculated the mean score for each statement.

Table 2. Selected Questions Related to Stress Management

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5	\bar{x}
1	Stress is a nonspecific response of the organism to demands for adaptation to changing conditions.	1	2	8	11	32	4.31
2	Sources of stress include: organizational, psychosocial, individual, and digital factors.	0	0	5	20	29	4.44
3	The leadership style can be a potential source of stress.	0	0	1	15	38	4.69
4	Job enrichment is a source of stress.	20	20	14	0	0	1.89
5	A disrupted work-life balance is a source of stress.	0	0	0	10	44	4.81
6	Organizational conflict is a source of stress.	1	1	1	12	39	4.61
7	A high degree of perfectionism is a source of stress.	0	3	6	10	35	4.43
8	The most stress-prone professions include healthcare, education, IT, service, and helping professions.	5	10	5	15	19	3.61

Source: Own research of the authors

In the process of data collection through the survey, the responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics. For each question in Part 2 of the questionnaire, we calculated the mean score, which offered valuable insight into the general attitudes of respondents toward stress management. This statistical method enabled us to identify trends, recurring patterns, and notable variations across the responses. These findings

will be further elaborated in the subsequent sections of the paper. Notably, the final two questions were specifically designed to examine perceptions of contemporary stress management approaches, such as the promotion of mental health culture and the implementation of flexible working practices. The results for these questions are visually represented in Charts 1 and 2.

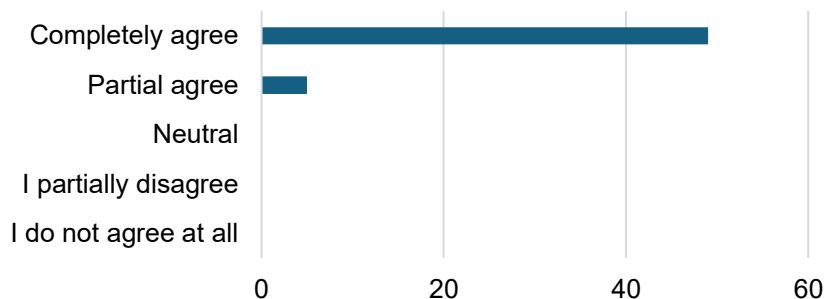


Chart 1. Mental health culture, leadership, flexibility, and psychological support as the foundation for effective professional stress management

Source: Own research of the authors

Chart 1 presents the four foundational pillars for effective management of professional stress: the cultivation of a mental health-oriented culture, supportive leadership practices, organizational flexibility, and the provision of psychological

support. These elements are closely interrelated, collectively fostering an environment conducive to early recognition and effective mitigation of stress. A strong mental health culture encourages openness, leadership behavior models support

and empathy, flexibility enables employees to balance demands more effectively, and psychological services offer essential

interventions. Together, they contribute to enhanced employee well-being and organizational resilience.

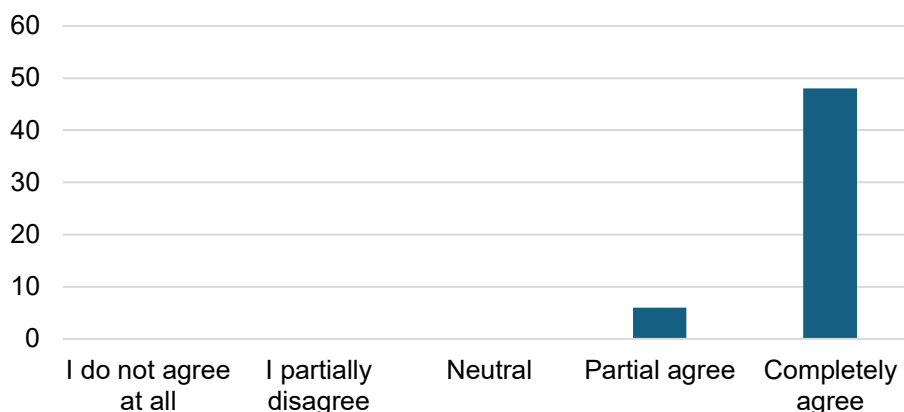


Chart 2. Flexible work arrangements (remote work, reduced hours, autonomy) contribute to better work-life balance and reduction of chronic stress.

Source: Own research of the authors

Chart 2 demonstrates the role of flexible work arrangements, such as remote work, reduced working hours, and increased autonomy, in fostering a healthier work-life balance. These practices enable employees to better manage their personal and professional responsibilities, thereby mitigating chronic stress.

6 RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

The analysis of the collected data yielded several significant insights into respondents' perceptions of professional stress and its underlying causes.

The highest average score ($\bar{x} = 4.81$) was attributed to the item concerning disrupted work-life balance, identifying it as the most dominant source of stress. This finding aligns with contemporary research emphasizing the impact of the digital era and the "always-on" culture, which contribute to chronic overload, emotional fatigue, and erosion of personal boundaries.

High mean scores were also recorded for questions addressing leadership style ($\bar{x} = 4.69$), organizational conflict ($\bar{x} = 4.61$), and psychosocial and digital stressors ($\bar{x} = 4.44$). These results underline the significance of interpersonal dynamics, organizational climate, and adaptive management in increasingly digitalized work environments.

An unexpected outcome emerged from the question related to job enrichment ($\bar{x} = 1.89$), which had the lowest average rating. This suggests that increased responsibility is not

perceived as inherently stressful. Rather, stress arises in the context of inadequate support, poor leadership, and disproportionate workloads without appropriate recognition or compensation.

Graphs 1 and 2 further illustrate the respondents' prioritization of mental health, empathetic leadership, flexible working hours, and psychological support as essential components of effective stress management strategies.

A strong mental health culture, characterized by open communication and the destigmatization of mental health issues, emerged as an influential factor. Supportive and empathetic leadership was also found to significantly contribute to a positive work environment. Organizational flexibility enables employees to better balance professional and private responsibilities, while access to psychological support enhances individuals' resilience to stress. These findings highlight the need for an integrated approach encompassing all these dimensions to effectively manage workplace stress.

Chart 2 emphasizes the importance of flexible work arrangements in improving work-life balance and reducing chronic stress. Remote work, reduced working hours, and increased autonomy allow employees greater control over their time and tasks, directly contributing to lower stress levels and higher overall job satisfaction. The results confirm that flexible work models have long-term positive effects on both individual well-being and organizational performance.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Promote flexible work models, including remote work, adjustable working hours, and employee autonomy in decision-making, to support work-life balance and mitigate long-term stress exposure.
2. Foster emotionally intelligent leadership through training programs focused on empathy, active listening, and early recognition of stress symptoms, enabling managers to offer timely and appropriate support.
3. Cultivate a mental health culture by initiating internal awareness campaigns, ensuring access to psychological counseling, and providing regular training in stress management techniques.
4. Minimize organizational conflict by establishing transparent procedures, encouraging team collaboration, and applying mediation strategies to resolve interpersonal misunderstandings.
5. Regularly review job roles and responsibilities to ensure that job enrichment promotes personal and professional growth rather than contributing to overload, thereby enhancing motivation and resilience.

8 CONCLUSION

Workplace stress is a multidimensional phenomenon that emerges from the dynamic interplay between individuals, their work environment, and the broader socio-economic context. An examination of theoretical models—

from Selye's biological approach, through Lazarus and Folkman's cognitive-appraisal theory, to contemporary psychosocial frameworks proposed by Shapiro, Slavich, and Cohen—reveals that stress is not merely a reaction to external demands but a complex process shaped by perception, coping resources, and contextual adaptation.

The study confirms that professional stress is particularly pronounced in emotionally intensive and high-demand occupations such as healthcare, education, information technology, and service industries. Stressors such as limited autonomy, poor communication, ambiguous roles, and digital overload were found to significantly affect employees' mental and physical well-being, as well as organizational effectiveness.

Empirical data from 54 respondents emphasized the role of social support, competent leadership, and access to professional development as protective factors. In this regard, contemporary stress management must be both holistic and context-sensitive. The integration of mental health initiatives, flexible work arrangements, emotional intelligence development, and a supportive organizational culture constitutes not only a reactive but also a proactive approach to workforce resilience.

Ultimately, effective stress management transcends individual coping mechanisms; it necessitates collective commitment, cultural change, and strategic human resource practices aimed at sustaining workplace health and long-term organizational success.

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